The Effects of Job Insecurity on Psychological Health and Withdrawal: A Longitudinal Study

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This paper reports on a repeated measures study of job insecurity conducted during drastic organisational change in one of Australia's large public transport organisations. In a redundant group (*n* = 32) and a control group (*n* = 63), effects of job insecurity and the availability of coping resources on psychological health and withdrawal were examined longitudinally by means of self-report questionnaires. Results indicate that job insecurity is associated with a deterioration of psychological health (i.e. leading to psychological distress and burnout), as well as job and organisational withdrawal. Contrary to expectations, however, neither support from colleagues nor management nor unions seemed to protect job incumbents from the negative effects of job insecurity. Apparently, these three sources of potential support do not have a stress-buffering effect. It was concluded that in order to combat the adverse effects of job insecurity on psychological health and morale, the job stressor itself has to be dealt with, instead of trying to render it less harmful by providing more social support.

"There is so much change going on nowadays, we don't know what is going to happen to our jobs. They treat us like mushrooms, keep us in the dark and feed us nothing but bullshit" (railway signalman in interview).

This quote possibly reflects the greatest of worries experienced by workers during organisational change, restructure, or cutbacks: uncertainty about the continuation of one's job. Today, many Australians feel or have felt this threat to the continuation of their jobs. Economic slowdown has increased the need for organisational restructuring and cutbacks in order to save costs and survive. This paper reports on a study with repeated measures, conducted during drastic organisational change with redundancies in one of Australia's large public transport organisations. It will attempt to support the hypothesis that job insecurity can have harmful effects on the employee's psychological health and attitudes, and that those effects cannot be alleviated by providing employees with resources to cope with organisational change and impending redundancy.

In the Australian State in which this study was conducted, the public service has generally adopted the practice not

dismissing staff. Still, it is likely that job insecurity, even in the public service, is a real and justified fear of potentially losing what one has and possibly being transferred to an undesirable situation. Reference can be made here to Jahoda (1982) as she speaks of the latent functions of work. Besides providing an income, employment implies regular activities, shared experiences, and contacts with colleagues. Work links individuals to goals other than their own and defines aspects of personal status and identity. More recently, Hobfoll (1989) argued that employment is a resource for personal and social safety but also for the enhancement of the self, "a fundamental goal after which people strive" (p. 516). Accordingly, threatened loss of such a resource is inherently stressful.

In the State Public Service, jobs were declared "surplus to requirements". Subsequently, the job incumbent received a redundancy payout or was redeployed into another area of the government sector. Due to both an unfavourable economic climate and a precarious financial status of the State government, neither way of solving the problem of a redundant public servant proved very easy. Thus a pool of surplus employees, who are still fully paid, was developed in the public service — mockingly referred to as the "Public Service Phantom Army". The pool contained workers whose services were no longer required, and who could neither be dismissed nor redeployed.

Job Insecurity and Psychological Health

Job insecurity in its most general sense reflects the discrepancy between the level of security a person experiences and the level he or she might prefer (Hartley, Jacobson, Klandermans, & van Vuuren, 1991). Job insecurity is associated with planned, but unannounced, redundancies. During this stage, employees are unsure who — if anyone — will be forced to leave the organisation. Job insecurity can be seen as an intermediate category between secure employment and unemployment (Jacobson, 1991; Hartley et al., 1991). Although it is not followed by job loss in many cases, job insecurity is considered to be a prelude to the termination and unemployment. Essentially, job insecurity "is an internal event reflecting a transformation of believes about

what is happening in the organisation and its environment" (Jacobson, 1991, p. 15).

From several studies it has become apparent that this job-insecure phase, in which termination is more or less anticipated, may very well be the most stressful aspect of the whole unemployment process. In their classical factory-closure study, Kasl, Gore, and Cobb (1975) reported that psychosomatic and psychological symptoms were most significant during the period preceding the redundancy. Once a discharged worker actually leaves the job, he or she may already have paid the price in terms of deteriorated psychological health. Other predominantly cross-sectional studies confirmed this picture, showing that job insecurity is linked with psychological distress (e.g. feelings of anxiety, depression and irritability, alcohol abuse, poor concentration) as well as psychosomatic complaints such as fatigue, headaches, and insomnia (Cooper & Melhuish, 1980; Hartley et al, 1991; Jenkins, MacDonald, Murray, & Strathdee, 1982; Kuhnert, 1987; van Dijkhuizen, 1980; van Vuuren, 1990). Only a few studies have found no relation between job insecurity and psychological health (Depolo & Sarchielli, 1985; Bussing & Jochum, 1986). Interestingly, in both of these studies job insecurity was defined as an objective situation (i.e. working in a job that was endangered or not) rather than as a subjective experience.

This distinction is important: "objective job insecurity" as used by Depolo & Sarchielli and Büssing & Jochum can in some sense be referred to as organisational or departmental brittleness. "Brittle" means fragile, apt to break, and applies in this article to a department that is threatening to close down or at least to shed staff. Subjective job insecurity describes the internal experience of the individual working within the brittle organisation or department. The department or organisational brittleness has to be perceived or "appraised", as Lazarus and Folkman (1984) put it, before it is likely to affect the individual. In an organisation that is going downhill, interpersonal differences may be found in the way workers perceive their individual job security (van Vuuren, 1990).

The first research question of the present study thus should be: Are organisational or departmental brittleness and the subjective experience of job insecurity related?

As indicated by the studies described above, job insecurity seems to be associated with symptoms of psychological stress in its most general sense. In addition, one could conjecture that prolonged exposure to a brittle situation in one's organisation or department could lead to an eventual wearing out, a depletion of an individual's resources. Such a syndrome of mental, emotional, and physical exhaustion is commonly referred to as "burnout". Pines (1993) argues that, ultimately, burnout results from a failure to find meaning in one's life. The syndrome has been shown to be linked with job dissatisfaction, tardiness, physical complaints, and increased turnover (Pines, Aronson, & Kafry, 1981; Pines & Aronson, 1988).

Therefore, the second research question we shall attempt to answer is whether prolonged exposure to an endangered job in a brittle department leads to burnout and psychological stress.

Job Insecurity and Withdrawal

Workers in the job-insecure phase have no idea of what to cope with, simply because they do not know what to expect ("They keep you in the dark"). According to Jacobson (1991), this environmental uncertainty is one of the most salient features of job insecurity. As soon as they have received their redundancy notices, incumbents can actively start anticipating the termination, but not before. In two ways, in fact, control over the desired continuity of a job is lost. Firstly, workers do not know whether they should start looking for other jobs. Secondly, they can hardly do anything themselves in order to regain the security of their present jobs. They can try to perform extra hard on their present jobs, but in a retrenching company even that does not secure one's job. The relative uncontrollability does not leave workers with much to combat job insecurity. There are passive coping strategies, however, that can be deployed in order to reduce the negative impact on psychological health (Hartley et al., 1991). A major strategy is what is referred to as the "disinvolvement syndrome" (Greenhalgh, 1979). Some people psychologically withdraw from a job, or their whole organisation for that matter, when they anticipate losing their position within it. In this way, the psychological impact of the actual eventual loss is reduced. Disinvolvement or psychological withdrawal was observed in a number of studies on threatened job incumbents (Owens, 1966; Hershey, 1972; Greenhalgh, 1979; Greenhalgh & Jick, 1979; Hall & Mansfield, 1979; Schein, 1980; Staw, Sandelands, & Dutton, 1981; Brockner et al., 1986; Sutton, 1987; van Vuuren, 1990; Hartley et al., 1991).

The impact of job insecurity thus extends beyond the potentially redundant employees. Due to withdrawal, demoralisation, resistance to change, anxiety, and employee turnover, it contributes to organisational dysfunctioning as well (Cameron, Whetten, & Myung, 1987; Greenhalgh, 1982). From several points of view, therefore, it is important that organisations, if not able to reduce job insecurity itself, at least put effort into trying to reduce its harmful effects.

The third research question to be answered in the present study is· Does psychological withdrawal occur, or, in other words, can the development of a "disinvolvement syndrome" as an attempt to cope with job insecurity be found?

Social Support

In most views of occupational stress, social support is regarded as a strong moderating variable that buffers the negative impact of work-related stressors (cf. the Michigan Role Stress Model of Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek & Rosenthal, 1964, and Buunk, 1990). In the case of job insecurity, three social support factors in particular deserve attention: support by colleagues, confidence in management, and protection by trade unions (Burke, 1988; Gore, 1978; Hartley et al., 1991; van Vuuren, 1990). Social support from colleagues enhances the development of a system of shared beliefs or "social representations" (Moscovici, 1984) that may help to counteract the negative effects of job insecurity. As for confidence in management; if there is little assurance from above about job numbers or departmental survival — or mere information on what is going to happen — the development of psychological symptoms and withdrawal may well increase. If no help is offered by unions in terms of protecting jobs or guaranteeing payouts, the more difficult it will be to cope with job insecurity. In fact, the three potential sources of social support can provide employees with a feeling, or at least an illusion of control over the stressor of job insecurity (cf. Hobfoll, 1989).

The final research question concerns the stress-buffering or moderating effect of social support resources in cases of experienced job insecurity.

Hypotheses

With respect to these four research questions, we hypothesise that·

1. subjective job insecurity is associated with departmental or organisational brittleness;
2. job insecurity leads to symptoms of psychological stress and burnout;
3. job insecurity leads to withdrawal from the job and from the organisation;
4. support from colleagues, management, and unions buffers the harmful effects of experienced job insecurity on psychological health and involvement.

Method

Subjects and Procedure

The study was conducted during 1990 and 1991. The research setting was one of Australia's large State public transport corporations. At the time, the corporation employed about 20,000 people and provided train, tram, and bus services for travellers in metropolitan and in rural areas. The organisation had experienced three chief executives and four name changes during the five years preceding the study. The State ministry for transport had experienced three directors-general and four ministers for transport. Neither organisational change nor job insecurity were novelties in this organisation.

Four departments in the transport organisation were singled out on the basis of being brittle, that is, having an objective threat of impending redundancies or complete closure. A total of 105 employees participated in the study, distributed across departments as follows: property management ($n = 50$), way maintainers ($n = 20$), printing works ($n = 14$), and uniform factory ($n = 21$). Questionnaires were offered twice with a two-month interval. The response rate at the follow-up was 89%, leaving 95 subjects for longitudinal analysis. Throughout the departments, response rates varied from 50 to 80 per cent. Ages of subjects ranged from 22 to 62 ($M = 40.7$, $SD = 9.93$) and number of years of service from 1 to 36 ($M = 12.9$, $SD = 8.9$). Seventy-five per cent of the subjects were male, twenty-five per cent female, a reasonable reflection of the gender distribution in the public transport industry.

Design

A quasi-experimental design with repeated measures (Cook & Campbell, 1979) was used (see Table 1). At the start of the study all four department were brittle, in that in all departments there was uncertainty about the continuation of

their operations. Without even the researchers being certain in advance, "the axe fell" in two of the four departments in the course of the study. Two months after the first measure, both the printing works and the uniform factory had indeed closed. Surplus staff were either (temporarily) redeployed into jobs in other areas of the public service ($n = 21$) or sent home with redundancy payouts ($n = 11$). Rather serendipitously, the four departments initially studied split up into a longitudinal "treatment" and a control group. Employees from the printing works and the uniform factory were considered to fit into the treatment or "axe fell" group. The control group contained both property management and way maintainers, since during the period between the two measures, nothing changed to the brittleness of those two departments. Rumours about redundancies were around all the time, but by the time of the second measure, they still had not occurred in either department — the threat of impending redundancy remained present. Seven control group subjects and three former printing or uniform workers (i.e. from the "axe fell" group) did not respond at the follow-up.

Measures

A self-report questionnaire containing seven scales was completed anonymously by all subjects. These scales originated from the revised Dutch version (Bergers, Marcelissen, & de Wolff, 1986) of the work stress questionnaire developed by Caplan, Cobb, French, van Harrison, and Pinneau (1975) and from the survey that van Vuuren (1990) used in her field study on job insecurity (see also Hartley et al., 1991, pp. 65–103). All scales ranged from never (1) to always (4), except for job insecurity, support from management, protection from unions, and organisational withdrawal, which ranged from never (1) to always (5), and burnout, which ranged from never (1) to always (7).

Job Insecurity. This variable was measured by four items; for example "Do you expect to be in your current position five years from now?" (van Vuuren, 1990). In these questions, words such as position or situation were used rather than work or job so that the scale could also be presented to workers who had been made redundant — thus mostly without a job. The internal consistency was satisfactory (Cronbach's alpha = .68).

Withdrawal. Two types of psychological withdrawal were considered: (a) withdrawal from the job (3 items, Cronbach's alpha = .68), for example "Do you feel involved with your work?" (reversed) (van Vuuren, 1990); and (b) withdrawal from the organisation (5 items, alpha = .68), for example "I am proud to tell people that I work for this corporation" (reversed) (van Vuuren, 1990).

Psychological Health. Two indicators for psychological health were used: (a) psychological distress (11 items, alpha = .77), for example "How often did you felt depressed over the last month?" (Bergers, Marcelissen, & de Wolff,

TABLE 1

Design of the Study

	Time 1	Time 2
"Axe fell" group	$n = 35$	$n = 32$
Control group	$n = 70$	$n = 63$

TABLE 2

Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) for the "Axe fell" Group ($n = 32$) and Control Group ($n = 63$)

GROUPS	"AXE FELL"				CONTROL			
TIME	TIME 1		TIME 2		TIME 1		TIME 2	
MEANS / STANDARD DEVIATIONS	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Job insecurity	3 25	1 17	2 65	84	2 98	76	3 20	1 17
Psychological stress	2 20	55	1 59	59	2.14	47	2 00	.91
Burnout	3 16	1 00	2 27	.92	3 15	73	2 93	1 35
Job withdrawal	1.73	75	1 04	1 05	1 90	67	1 77	91
Organisational withdrawal	2 64	1 00	1 38	1 27	3 16	80	2 88	1 34

1986); and (b) burnout (21 items, alpha = .91), for example "I feel hopeless" (Pines et al., 1981; Pines & Aronson, 1988).

Social Support. Three types of social support were distinguished (all scales reversed): (a) lack of social support from colleagues (10 items, alpha =. 75), for example "When problems arise at work, can you discuss them with your co-workers?" (Bergers, Marcelissen, & de Wolff, 1986); (b) lack of confidence in management (7 items, alpha = .91), for example "I'm not sure this management will always treat its employees fairly" (van Vuuren, 1990); and(c) lack of protection from unions (6 items, alpha = .88), for example "If something on the job worries you, you can easily discuss it with the union" (van Vuuren, 1990).

Results

Means and standard deviations of the research variables are presented in Table 2.

Although the term "job insecurity" for the first scale is retained throughout the results section, it is emphasised that this should be interpreted as "situation" insecurity for the "axe fell" group during the second measure, as some subjects were indeed out of a job around that time (the questions on the scale were made to fit subjects both with and without jobs; see the Method section). Given the results in Table 2 the four hypotheses were evaluated as follows.

Departmental Brittleness and Subjective Job Insecurity

In order to investigate the extent to which departmental brittleness is associated with experienced job insecurity, an ANOVA with repeated measures was carried out with group (redundant and control) and time (Time 1 [T_1] and Time 2 [T_2]) as independent variables and future insecurity as dependent variable. Results showed a significant time effect, $F(1, 92) = 28.67, p < .001$, group effect, $F(1, 92) = 2.00, p < .05$, and time x group interaction effect, $F(1, 92) = 16.33, p < .001$. Over time, job insecurity decreased in the "axe fell" group and increased in the control group (time and group effects). The significant interaction effect indicates that the experience of job insecurity is linked to departmental brittleness, which confirms the first hypothesis.

Job Insecurity and Psychological Health

In order to test the second and third hypotheses, MANOVAs were carried out. This was deemed possible since the dependent variables were moderately correlated (ranging from .34 to .67). The second hypothesis, that job insecurity leads to an increase in symptoms of psychologi-

cal distress and burnout, was tested by performing a MANOVA with repeated measures (on T_1 and T_2) that included the two indicators of psychological health (i.e. stress and burnout) as dependent variables. This analysis yielded a significant time effect, $F(1, 92) = 4.05, p < .01$, group effect, $F(1, 92) = 183.34, p < .001$, and time x group interaction effect, $F(1, 92) = 2.73, p < .05$. Although symptoms of psychological stress and burnout decreased over time (time effect), the control group reported more symptoms than the "axe fell" group (group effect). The prevalence of symptoms of psychological stress and burnout decreased more in the "axe fell" group than in the control group (interaction effect).

Subsequently, univariate analysis with repeated measures for each health variable were carried out (see Table 3).

It is remarkable that despite the significant multivariate group effect, the univariate group effects of the psychological health variables lack significance. However, both time effects, but even more importantly, the two group x time interaction effects remain highly significant. These interaction effects arise from a significant decline in reported symptoms of psychological stress, $t(1, 62) = 4.46, p < .001$, and burnout, $t(1, 62) = 3.85, p < .001$, in the case of the "axe fell" group. During the same period, *no* significant change was observed in the control group: psychological stress $t(1, 31) = 1.17$, not significant; burnout $t(1, 31) = 1.17$, not significant.

In other words, these results suggest that being certain about the worst (the axe fell) appears to alleviate symptoms of psychological stress and burnout, whereas prolonged uncertainty seems to be associated with continuously high levels of psychological stress and burnout. This would confirm the second hypothesis: job insecurity leads to symptoms of psychological stress and burnout.

Job Insecurity and Withdrawal

A second, similar, MANOVA included both withdrawal variables. In addition to the control group ($n = 63$), only the 21 redeployed employees from the "axe fell" group were included in this MANOVA, since at T_2 their unemployed former colleagues ($n = 11$) obviously could not answer questions on organisational or job withdrawal. The second MANOVA showed a significant time effect, $F(1, 81) = 14.84, p < .001$, group effect, $F(1, 81) = 15.29, p < .001$, and group x time interaction effect, $F(1, 81) = 6.05, p < .05$, as well.

Subsequent univariate analysis revealed significant time, group, and interaction effects for both withdrawal variables (see Table 3). Again, both interaction effects were caused by a significantly less withdrawal from the job, $t(1, 62) = 3.19, p < .005$, and from the organisation, $t(1, 62) = 4.85, p$

TABLE 3

ANOVAs with Repeated Measures (T_1, T_2) for Psychological Health and Withdrawal Variables for the "Axe fell" and Control Groups (*F* values, *df* = 1,92)

VARIABLES	PSYCHOL. STRESS	BURNOUT	WITHDRAWAL FROM JOB	WITHDRAWAL FROM ORGANISATION
Main effects				
Group	04	2.98	11 47***	29 67***
Time	26 58***	23 71***	21 56***	30 23***
Interaction effect				
Group x Time	7 05**	8.69**	6 58*	12 22***

Note *p < 05, **p < 01, ***p < 001

$< .001$, in the redeployed employees from the "axe fell" group. No such significant change between T_1 and T_2 was observed in the control group: withdrawal from the job, $t(1, 21) = 1.48$, not significant; withdrawal from the organisation, $t(1, 21) = 1.50$, not significant.

Withdrawal from the job and from the organisation was more pronounced in the continuously insecure control group than it was among the less insecure redeployed employees (group effect). Indeed, withdrawal becomes less pronounced over time (time effect), but this tendency appears to be significant only in the redeployed group and not in the continuously employed group whose jobs continued to be insecure (interaction effect). Subjects withdrew more and more from their jobs and the organisation as their experience of job insecurity wore on. Redeployment into a more secure position decreased withdrawal significantly. These results appear to confirm the third hypothesis: job insecurity leads to withdrawal from the job and from the organisation.

Job Insecurity and Social Support

For each of the three resources of potential support (i.e. social support from colleagues, confidence in the management, and protection from unions) two equally sized subgroups were formed, in order to investigate the moderating effect of those resources. One group consisted of subjects that scored above the median of that resource (ns range from 46 to 48) and one group of subjects that scored below the median at T_1 (ns range from 47 to 49). The same median split procedure was used for job insecurity at T_1, resulting in two groups, respectively scoring high ($n = 47$) and low ($n = 48$) on job insecurity. Subsequently, three MANOVAs with repeated measures were carried out, with the two indicators of psychological health (i.e. psychological stress and burnout) at T_2 as dependent variables, and job insecurity (high/low) and each of the three moderators (high/low coping resources) as independent variables, respectively. Contrary to expectations, none of the three moderator x insecurity interaction effects were significant: social support from colleagues, $F(1, 92) = .58$, not significant; confidence in management, $F(1, 92) = .04$, not significant; protection from unions, $F(1, 92) = .35$, not significant.[1]

The fourth hypothesis therefore has to be rejected neither social support from colleagues nor confidence in management nor protection from unions prevented deterioration of psychological health in employees who experience job insecurity.

Discussion

Results from this longitudinal study show that working in a continuously brittle department can gradually exacerbate individual experiences of job insecurity and its related effects. Insecurity and its associated adverse effects on psychological health and organisational involvement decreased in the group of employees that had been made redundant and partly redeployed, whereas the control group of continuously employed workers experienced an increase in job insecurity. The control group also reported more symptoms of psychological stress and burnout and showed greater withdrawal from the job and the organisation in an attempt to cope with their experience of job insecurity.

It seems that certainty about a job situation (even if that is the unpleasant certainty of having been made redundant) is less detrimental to a worker's psychological health than a situation of prolonged job insecurity (see also Van Vuuren, 1990). If an employee was either redeployed or made redundant, the environmental uncertainty was removed. A transition could be made into a role (redundant or redeployed)

with certain role prescriptions, instead of the mere structural void of the job insecurity experience (Jacobson, 1991). However, other factors may have been responsible for the improvement of psychological health and the decline in future job insecurity in the redundant group. Redundant employees were offered (modest) "golden handshakes" upon leaving the organisation. It may be the partial relief from possible financial burdens of redundancy that made the surplus employees feel better and less worried about the future. It would be interesting to include the workers' perception of their fate in future research. For instance, it is likely that some redundant workers prefer to receive redundancy payments or are satisfied with their golden handshakes, whereas others prefer redeployment. Winefield, Tiggemann, and Goldney (1988) found that satisfactory employment results in improved psychological wellbeing and that unsatisfactory employment does not. Accordingly, it may be expected that the perception of one's fate plays a moderating role between job insecurity and psychological health.

The assumed importance of the availability of coping resources during organisational change was not supported by our results. However, a cautionary note should be made here: The sample under study was small, so the power of the statistical tests was relatively poor. Accordingly, it cannot be ruled out that statistically significant relationships would have been found, had a larger sample been investigated. Nevertheless, the results of this study fail to indicate that support from colleagues, management, or unions helps to reduce the negative impact of job insecurity. In his critical review of the literature, Buunk (1990) reports a substantial number of studies in which no stress-buffering effect of social support was observed with respect to psychological stress. One possible explanation is that social support, if deficient, can actually cause stress rather than alleviate it. Given the realities of industrial relations between railway management and unions in Australia, it may be possible that discussion about job numbers stretches the period of uncertainty, and may at least in that sense render social support from management and unions deficient as far as the individual worker is concerned.

The results from the potential sources of social support may also require an altogether different causal explanation. Instead of social support reducing psychological stress, an increasingly high level of psychological stress may in fact be an incentive for employees to seek social support. This fits with a proactive view of employees who seek support when stressors — such as (pending) unemployment — threaten their psychological health (Schaufeli & VanYperen, 1993).

It follows from the negative results on the moderating role of the resources of social support that in order to reduce the detrimental effects of job insecurity on psychological health and involvement, job insecurity as the stressor itself has to be dealt with directly, instead of using indirect strategies such as providing social support. Van Vuuren (1990) argues that job insecurity can possibly be avoided by careful human resources planning, including cautious recruitment and hiring, training, career counselling and career planning, and even outplacement In the inevitable case of organisational downturn, this could render forced dismissals of personnel unnecessary. Also, if restructures are to be undertaken, the period of objective uncertainty on future job numbers and organisational structure should be kept as short as possible.

A strength of this study was its longitudinal and quasi-experimental design. Weaknesses include the short time frame, with a follow-up after two months. This basically

limits generalisation of the results to relatively short time intervals. The small sample size (N = 95) may have negatively affected the power of statistical testing, particularly when the moderating role of social support was studied. Moreover, our study was based purely on self-reported measures. Therefore, detected relationships may not only reflect their hypothesised connection, but could at least partly be caused by the subjects' urge to answer a single questionnaire as consistently as possible. Also, self-report can lead to responses biased by social desirability. Problems like these can be avoided by using objective psychophysiological or behavioural measures like absenteeism, turnover, or even blood pressure and other physiological indications, in future research.

Finally, the mere fact of announcing that one is going to study job insecurity immediately creates anxiety, amongst leaders of the organisation as well as amongst employees This research could thus have taken on a recursive character, as anxiety levels of subjects may have artificially increased in reaction to a researcher who — if only by his very presence — is suggesting that now something really is wrong with the place.

In times of restructuring, organisation leaders tend to be apprehensive towards an outsider moving about and asking questions about job security, as that may lead to further unrest amongst workers and unions. With an outsider, things may be said or suggested in the workplace that were not meant to be known yet. This study, however, indicates that silence from above surely erodes the extent to which workers experience control over the future of their jobs. And, as Greenhalgh (1991) warns, in that case, adverse reactions to job insecurity will exacerbate.

Footnote

1. This is because information is lost when scale scores are dichotomised according to the median split and when moderated regression analyses (Zedeck, 1971) have been performed. Essentially, this procedure examines whether the interaction between moderator (i e coping resource) and independent variable (i.e. job insecurity) makes a significant contribution to the accounted-for variance in the dependent variable (i e indicator of psychological health) As was to be expected, these analyses also yielded negative results.

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